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PREVIEW

The Politics of School Desegregation: The Case of Pittsburgh Public Schools, 1965- 1980

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A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate
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Curry School of Education

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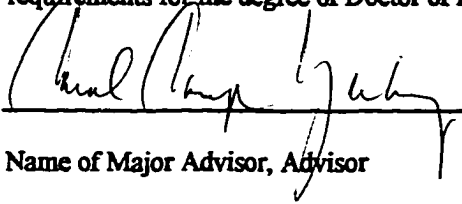
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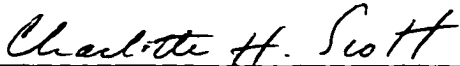
APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, The Politics of School Desegregation: The Case of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

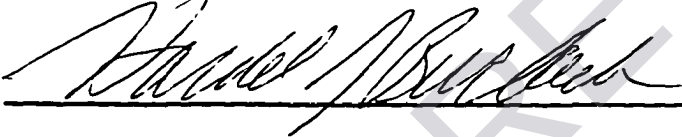


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April 4, 1997 Date

PREVIEW



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ABSTRACT

The Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) (Brown I) decision initiated the legal imperative for states to consider racial desegregation of public schools. The legal imperative to desegregate set into motion local initiatives designed to alleviate or perpetuate racial segregation in the schools.

The activity of individual school boards regarding racial desegregation of the schools ranged between voluntary compliance and massive resistance. Perhaps the most well-known desegregation struggles occurred in the Southern states, i.e. Prince Edward Virginia and Little Rock, Arkansas, while some of the most dramatic in the nation occurred in the Northeast, i.e. Boston, Massachusetts. Northeastern states' compliance to school desegregation mandates evolved into voluntary desegregation options.

This study is a research investigation of the desegregation of the public schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, specifically, a case study of the Pittsburgh public school system, focusing on the activities of the city's school board. Covering the school system's transition from 1965 - 1980, data will reveal unique developments with respect to the school system's desegregation .

Federal government initiatives and policies designed to remedy school segregation in America provides a broader context by which to understand the study's focus. In addition, relevant court decisions, the political ecology of the city of Pittsburgh, and relevant special interest group activity augment the study's development. The conceptual framework borrows from the complementary work of John Kingdon's ideas about agenda setting (1984), Graham Allison's (1971) Governmental Politics model, William Dunn's (1994) Policy Analytic Frame, and David Easton's (1965) model of Systems Theory. Relevant literature on school board activity and the

failure of school desegregation are among the dominant portions of the literature review. The investigation employs case study research methods, concentrating on conveying the complexity of the social phenomena being studied. Summary analysis concludes the study along with suggestions for future research.

PREVIEW

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents: John and Sarah Reed.

The two emotions that I feel upon completion of this journey are humility and appreciation.

I have been blessed with the unconditional love and support of my family. My parents – John and Sarah Reed, my sisters – Robin DeVaughn and Cheryl Ruffin and my nieces and nephew – Jessica, Kirsten, Kirby, Whitney, Jordan and Gordon, have made this endeavor possible. I realize, without you, this would never be. I only hope you are as proud of me as I am of you. Thank you.

I have also been blessed with a host of friends who have been like family to me. You know who you are. Thank you.

And finally, I am appreciative to the members of my dissertation committee. I recognize that I am unique in that each of my committee members has been, and will continue to be, meaningful to me.

Charlotte, early in my graduate career you provided encouragement to me. I remember my efforts that met with your approval. I do not know if you realize what that approval meant and means to me.

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Paula, you welcomed me into your home and your family. Invaluable. You provide me with academic as well as personal direction. You are a model of how to “do it all.”

Carol, for staying up late at night and getting up early in the morning to read, critique, and comment on and on and on... (with that blasted red pen), my work and the work of all of your students... for never appearing to doubt my ability... for all that I have learned, am learning, and will learn from and with you ... thank you. I can never repay you for your assistance in this endeavor. I only hope that I can be a friend, an advisor (personal and professional) and a teacher to my students as you have been to me.

Humbly,

Tracey Reed

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INTRODUCTION

The Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) (Brown I) decision initiated the legal imperative for states to consider racial desegregation of public schools. The legal imperative to desegregate set into motion local initiatives designed to alleviate or perpetuate racial segregation in the schools. Initially, the policy options most regularly promoted to alleviate segregation involved local authorities giving African American students the choice to attend all-white schools. Next, forced busing was the option of choice for many urban school systems given court rulings against previously mentioned freedom of choice plans. Later, options focused on school consolidation and redistricting plans that necessitated busing students. Most recently, plans to promote desegregation have focused on voluntary efforts such as the freedom of choice plans which have come in the form of magnet schools (Metz, 1986). Those initiatives designed to avoid school desegregation were usually not formal initiative, rather, school systems, in efforts to avoid desegregation, fought mandates requiring desegregation.

Although the necessity to desegregate schools initiated at the federal level (with the Court's Brown (1954 - 1955) decisions) , much of the desegregation activity that took place throughout the country was the direct result of mandates of state courts. The responsibility for the development of desegregation plans laid with local school boards. However, in certain instances, because of inactivity of school boards regarding compliance with

mandates to desegregate, the responsibility to develop desegregation plans was usurped by state courts.

The activity of various school boards regarding racial desegregation of the schools ranged between voluntary compliance to massive resistance. Perhaps the most well-known desegregation struggles occurred in the Southern states, i.e. Prince Edward Virginia and Little Rock, Arkansas, while some of the most dramatic in the nation occurred in the Northeast, i.e. Boston, Massachusetts. Northeastern compliance options to school desegregation mandates evolved into voluntary desegregation options.

As desegregation policy evolved, one of the most popular voluntary desegregation options for urban schools became magnet schools. Magnet schools incorporate elements of school choice and school desegregation. As a policy option, magnet schools have had an interesting evolution. The first magnet schools were not designed to promote school desegregation or school choice but rather magnets were first considered to improve inner-city schools by attempting to prevent the exodus of white families from those schools. The unique curricula offered at magnet schools would prevent "white flight" to the suburbs.

As the need to desegregate schools became more immediate (given various court decisions), especially in major Northeastern and mid-Western cities, magnet schools became useful as a tool to promote school desegregation. It was, however, only after significant litigation put boundaries upon freedom of choice measures and citizens showed their deeply felt objection to busing for desegregation did magnet schools begin to be considered as an option to promote school desegregation.

The evolution of magnet schools continues. As public schooling is under attack relative to the quality of education that it provides for students, magnet schools are increasingly being looked to as a way to improve quality of education.

This study is a research investigation of the desegregation of the public schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, specifically, a case study of the Pittsburgh public school system, focusing on the activities of the city's school board. Covering the school system's transition from 1965 - 1980, data will reveal unique developments with respect to the school system's desegregation .

Federal government initiatives and policies designed to remedy school segregation in America provides a broader context by which to understand the study's focus. In addition, relevant court decisions, the political ecology of the city of Pittsburgh, and relevant special interest group activity augment the study's development. The conceptual framework borrows from the complementary work of John Kingdon's ideas about agenda setting (1984), Graham Allison's (1971) Governmental Politics model, William Dunn's (1994) Policy Analytic Frame, and David Easton's (1965) model of Systems Theory. Relevant literature on school board activity and the failure of school desegregation are among the dominant portions of the literature review. The investigation employs case study research methods, concentrating on conveying the complexity of the social phenomena being studied. Summary analysis concludes the study along with suggestions for future research.

In subsequent sections of this study, the complete evolution of school desegregation policy in America will be discussed. This study focuses on one school system's experience

in that evolution. Specifically, the study examines the municipal school board decision-making process regarding the racial desegregation of the public schools and the social, political, and economic contexts within which decisions regarding desegregation were made.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

This study uses case methodology to examine municipal decision-making regarding racial desegregation of the Pittsburgh public schools. The chronicle of the school desegregation experience in the Pittsburgh public schools is the primary focus of this study. A case study of municipal school board decision-making becomes the primary unit of analysis, focusing specifically on events that impacted school board decisions that led to the promotion or avoidance of school desegregation. In order to provide a better understanding of the political dimensions of educational policy-making and decision-making, a retrospective look at the steps of policy analysis will be performed.

Many reform ideas that are aimed at desegregating schools or avoiding school desegregation have been arrived at, not as a result of "scientific" analysis or even logical reasoning but rather, in order to appease special interest groups or powerful individuals. The point is not to suggest that politics should or could be removed from decisions regarding school desegregation. This investigation, however: 1) seeks to identify the key players; 2) the positions of the key players; 3) players' sources of their influence; 4) the tactics players used; and 5) who won the battles fought in school decision making and municipal school board policy-making. The study attempts to clarify the economic contexts within which decisions were ultimately made to implement magnet schooling as a means to further school desegregation in the Pittsburgh public schools. Issues of race and class

permeate this study, providing another lens by which to view complex political and social phenomena.

Research Questions

This study examines the following questions:

1. What were the circumstances that surrounded the decisions that led the school board to attempt to desegregate the schools?
2. What were some of the remedies that the school board used in its attempt to correct the racial segregation of the schools?
3. What were some of the ways that the school board attempted to avoid racial segregation of the schools?
4. What were the intended and unintended consequences of the various school desegregation remedies? What unintended consequences were also unanticipated? In effect, what were and are the spillover effects on local, state, municipal level politics?
5. What were the broader municipal politics to occasion the movement for magnet schooling to solve the problem of school segregation in Pittsburgh?
6. Who were the significant stakeholders and how did they inform the decision-making environment in which they acted?

Background

School desegregation

School desegregation is, in the history of public schooling of this country, a relatively recent phenomena. It was not until 1954 that school districts were explicitly

given the legal mandate to desegregate schools. Brown vs. Board of Education (Brown I – 1954) overturned the case which had set the legal precedent that deemed racial segregation constitutional Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) "... the separate-but-equal rationale of the Robert's Court was implanted as a national standard applying to the Fourteenth Amendment [The Equal Protection Clause]" (Anderson, 1985, p. 411). The "separate-but-equal" doctrine of the Plessy decision was constitutionally applied to every public accommodation in America legalizing the separation of citizens based upon race (Anderson, 1985). The 1954 Brown decision, although it did effectively de-legitimize racial segregation, did not offer any direction regarding when desegregation of public accommodations must take place. The most resistant areas, then, would proceed deliberately slowly.

The question regarding desegregation timetables were especially relevant in schools, since segregation in the public schools was the reason for the Brown I (1954) decision. Necessity for clarity regarding time to comply with Brown I (1954) resulted in another decision referred to as Brown II (1955) which called for "all deliberate speed" in desegregating the public schools.

The Brown decisions called into question whether affirmative action was required to remedy de jure racial segregation, (de jure segregation is legally mandated, "purposeful" segregation) in the public schools and, if any action at all was required to address de facto segregation (segregation which occurs "naturally," i.e. as the result of housing patterns). Did Brown (I and II) require active government intervention in desegregating schools or did

the decisions simply require that school officials not discriminate on the basis of race when admitting and assigning children to schools and drawing school attendance zones (Anderson 1984)?

Strict integrationists would answer that the Brown decisions undoubtedly called for affirmative action on the part of school boards to erase all vestiges of dual (one white and one black) school systems. However, segregationist could argue (indeed, did argue) that the Constitutional principle of equal protection upon which Brown was based does not specify that public schools must be racially desegregated or that public schools must be operated at all, only that school officials must not discriminate on the basis of race in their assignment of students to schools (Anderson 1985). Specifically, school officials may not purposefully assign students to schools in such a way that racial segregation is established or maintained in the public schools.

The question of the need for affirmative action in cases of de jure segregation was treated by the Supreme Court in 1968 when it decided the Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia (1968) and held that "freedom of choice" plans are acceptable as a remedy to desegregate schools if they in fact serve to desegregate schools. Freedom of choice plans designed as measures of massive resistance to school desegregation were, however, unconstitutional. (Green v. County School Board of New Kent County Virginia (1968))

"The constitutionality of an 'open door' or 'freedom of choice' policy could be

judged only in light of its utility in bringing about desegregation" (Anderson, 1985, p. 418).

The freedom of choice plan in the G reen case exemplifies those plans that were historically used by school systems to avoid desegregation and to place the burden of desegregating schools on black children and their parents. The G reen choice plan was designed for the express purpose of keeping white and black children in separate schools and was therefore deemed unconstitutional (Anderson, 1985). Freedom of choice plans, though, were decidedly not unconstitutional. G reen, therefore, legitimated freedom of choice plans as desegregation tools.

Introduction of Civil Rights Act of 1964, specifically Title VI which withheld federal funding from any racially segregated and/or discriminatory institution or practice, had a dramatic effect on school desegregation efforts.

"...the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) set forth guidelines for determining whether or not local school districts were desegregated. These guidelines were based on the percentage of students from both races attending the same school (Mayer 1974, p.9).

It was not until the adoption of the Civil Rights Act (1964) that schools felt the tangible impact of white parents' refusal to have their children transported on school buses to desegregate. As desegregation plans needed to be put into effect in order to maintain federal support, opposition to busing (busing is perhaps the most direct, expedient mode of school desegregation) became more widespread (Mayer 1974).

Those in opposition to school desegregation buttressed their opposition with arguments against what became commonly known as "forced busing." The rhetoric against

forced busing became even more potent when state agencies that did locally the work that the Federal Civil Rights Commission did nationally (regulation of public entities actions regarding racial discrimination) began to mandate that localities adhere to desegregation laws by requiring development and implementation of plans that would desegregate the public schools.

The perceived “force” exacerbated the negative feelings that many citizens had regarding desegregation of the schools especially given that the most expedient modes of desegregation would require drastic changes in the lives of white children.

“...the percentage of whites unwilling to have school children bused for racial desegregation rose suddenly from 41 percent in early 1971 to 69 percent by March of 1972 following a series of federal court decisions which ordered busing solutions as the only means to correct urban school segregation by race...In sharp contrast, by an overwhelming margin of 83 percent to 15 percent, parents whose children are bused to school for non-racial reasons are satisfied with the arrangement...It's not the distance, stated a white mother in Richmond Virginia, candidly, "It's the niggers" (Mayer, 1974, xvii).

The sentiment expressed by this parent in Richmond, Virginia is only one, relatively mild example of the violent opposition expressed to busing for the purpose of school desegregation. In cities all over the country, citizens mobilized to fight against busing for desegregation purposes – the efforts of citizens ranged from physical barriers to school buses to election of desegregation opponents to local school boards (Metz 1984). Opposition to busing created the need for school systems to develop desegregation plans that were less offensive to the public.

The Green (1968) decision established that freedom of choice plans are only

acceptable if the plans actually desegregate schools. Evidence of the extremely negative, often violent reaction to busing for the purposes of desegregation, created the need to find desegregation options that had elements of volunteerism and/or choice. Title VI (of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) HEW regulations applied to segregated institutions made segregated schools take notice of law, realizing that the choice to ignore the law would lead to loss funds.

Magnet schooling options were designed to be attractive enough to draw students from all racial groups to a particular school and were regulated such that strict guidelines for racial composition were built into the schools' admissions processes. Because parents could choose schools for their children, the express purpose of busing for desegregation was masked. As a result, magnet schooling presented a viable solution to the 'active, dramatic, and sometimes violent resistance to court-ordered desegregation' (Metz 1986, 15).

Pittsburgh's School Desegregation

Given the relatively small and fairly diffuse black population in Pittsburgh, segregated schooling was not as severe a problem in the 1950's as it had been in some other cities. Since there were critical masses of Black citizens in the city's Hill District (central city), and Homewood (east side) areas, there were larger numbers of African-American students attending 5th Avenue High School (the Hill District), Westinghouse Junior High/High School (Homewood), and various Hill District and Homewood area elementary